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ABSTRACT

This article summarizes the language planning situation in Denmark, specifically dealing with: (1) sociolinguistic characteristics of the modern Danish speech community; (2) types of language problems prevailing in this community; (3) organizations involved in language planning in Denmark; (4) the organization and operation of the Danish Language Board; and (5) improvement of the present treatment pattern. Danish shows a high degree of stability and homogeneity, but there are sociolectic and professiolectic differences which are more problematic than regional differences. Present-day Danish shows much influence from English, French, German, and Swedish. Although no major language problems can be identified in Denmark, foreign language teaching, loanwords, communication barriers, and style and correctness are four areas of difficulty. The Danish Language Board is the government language planning agency, although other groups can be identified as involved in language planning, including linguists, language teachers, grammarians, and the national Danish broadcasting company. Inadequacies of the Danish Language Board include conceptual and theoretical inconsistency, a narrow approach to language planning, and the outdated educational background of the staff. (AM)

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LANGUAGE PROBLEMS AND LANGUAGE TREATMENT IN THE DANISH SPEECH COMMUNITY

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In an earlier issue of this Newsletter, language planning in Sweden was dealt with (See MOLDE 1975). In the present article I intend to summarize the situation in another Scandinavian country: Denmark. Five questions will be answered in this connection:

1. What sociolinguistic features characterize the modern Danish speech community?
2. What types of language problems prevail in the Danish speech community?
3. Who does language treatment in Denmark?
4. How is the Danish Language Board organized and how does it operate?
5. How can the present treatment pattern be improved?

SOCIOLINGUISTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SPEECH COMMUNITY

Just like the other Nordic languages (especially Norwegian, Swedish and Icelandic), Danish has a long and well-established written tradition. For this reason Denmark is generally considered a clear example of the so-called "cultivation approach" (See NEUSTUPNÝ 1974:39). Present-day Danish shows a high degree of stability.

Another feature characterizing the modern Danish speech community, is its pronounced homogeneity. If one does not include the inhabitants of the Faeroe Islands and Greenland, 99.5 per cent of the population in Denmark speaks Danish.

Within the speech community you find a fairly consistent standard, and the dialectic and sociolectic deviations are relatively small. In the last three or four decades it has been possible to observe how the many regional dialects were combined step by step into varieties each covering larger and larger areas. This movement towards an even more consistent and homogeneous speech community is, of course, due to the enormous increase of inter-regional communication. With the development of TV and radio, the use of Danish has become much more consistent; and from a situation where we had maybe a hundred local dialects, we have reached the present-day situation with only five major regional varieties of the standard language. These regional varieties are quite mutually intelligible — provided there is the desire to communicate.

The sociolectic and professiolectic differences must, however, be considered larger and more problematic than the regional differences. With the general specialization of the community, a number of communication barriers have arisen between the more and the less educated groups, between speakers of the common language and speakers of various technical languages. Though these barriers do not seem to be as high as for instance in the British-English speech community, they still constitute one of the largest language problems in Denmark today.

In the description of the situation in the present-day Danish speech community, certain external features must also be mentioned. Being a small speech community-with only 5.5 million Danish-speakers-, Denmark is strongly exposed to the influences of the large international speech communities. So the adoption of English words in Danish has been very marked over the past thirty years. But during the last ten or fifteen years there have been some clear changes in the pattern: Danish is obviously not only exposed to English, changes in syntax and vocabulary show exposure to Swedish, German and French as well.

The Swedish influence has been noted for quite some time, and is due primarily to the numerous trade connections between Sweden and Denmark. But the fact that the Swedish television (and radio) programs are easily taken in by the whole eastern half of Denmark also plays a part. The influence of German and French on the other hand is more recent. An important factor here is Denmark's membership (since 1972) in the Common Market, EEC. The impact of German television programs also plays a part in the German influence on Danish.

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THE LANGUAGE PROBLEMS

Given the present sociolinguistic situation, the Danes cannot be said to face any big or serious language problems. Compared to what you find elsewhere in the world, our problems are minor. This absence of serious language problems is very much due to the fact that language matters have never been politicized to any high degree. And in this respect our situation differs from the ones you find in other 'language cultivation' countries like Norway, Belgium, Canada and Turkey.

But still, if you ask them, most Danish language planners would find that they have enough to do. And the problems they deal with can be arranged in these four groups:

(a) foreign language teaching;
(b) adoption of loanwords;
(c) certain undemocratic communication-barriers;
(d) style and correctness.

At the moment there does not exist any coherent and consistent *foreign language teaching* planning. And foreign language teaching has not been considered in its totality and related to the predicted future needs for international communication. Therefore schools and courses work with almost the same distribution of weekly lessons today as they did in the last century. Both English, French, German, Russian—and Latin — are taught rather extensively and on most educational levels. But it has never really been discussed whether the general organization of foreign language teaching is adequate. For an example take Latin teaching: Is it rational to claim that Latin is still the best introduction to a common international vocabulary, when it has been shown that an extremely high percentage of the time devoted to the teaching of Latin is used for rote-learning? Probably not. If the purpose is an introduction to a common international vocabulary, *Interlingua* is a better solution. Interlingua has been constructed on the basis of roots which dominate and are used in a common international vocabulary today. This new language has an extremely simple grammar, so that no time is wasted on sophisticated and useless grammatical subtleties. In Sweden Interlingua has been taught with amazing results. And the general teaching of Interlingua can now be considered a useful instrument to bridge the gap between the more and the less educated members of modern society.

One of the most important tasks for language treatment in Denmark is the monitoring of the *adoption of loanwords*, the problem being to select forms for loanwords which can fit into the existing Danish language system. In this field a fairly stable practice has been developed, though the underlying principles have never been made explicit.

The extension of the various scientific and technological fields have in the past few years raised new problems. The layman and the expert have difficulties in understanding each other, and this again prevents the layman from actively participating in the decision-making processes of society. This *communication-barrier* forms an obstacle to the realization of the generally accepted idea of democracy. (See DAHLSTEDT 1976). In the last couple of years, these issues have been frequently debated. A few results of this debate can now be observed. In 1975, the government established a board of advisors to insure, among other things, that laws of more general interest should be transformed into readable pamphlets and brochures. More and more researchers and professionals in many different fields are asking for courses on popularization and writing techniques. And my guess is that within the next five or ten years such courses will be established at most universities and advanced colleges. As another attempt to bridge the gap between the layman and the professional, I should mention terminology. Terminological work now takes place within more and more scientific and technical fields. Denmark is involved in an extensive international term planning within the institutions of the Common Market.

The last group of language problems to be mentioned is related to *style and correctness*. Until a few years ago these matters appeared unproblematic to most linguists and language teachers. But now that we have sociolinguistic knowledge about speech norms, it has become clear to many of us that the old concepts of 'good style' and 'correctness' reflect only *one* norm-conception, namely that of the social elite. With this new understanding many linguists, teachers, and professional language users, now have a sceptical attitude to the perpetuation of the elite-norms. There is an ever increasing awareness of the unfair distribution of language privileges in society. For this reason I don't think that in Denmark we should fear the same development as has taken place in France: That is, I don't think that we will develop *too* sophisticated and *too* refined a norm in the Danish speech community;—though this certainly is a danger which threatens most "cultivation-communities" at some time in their development.

My optimistic view could be supported by some concrete developments in recent years:—the use of the Danish pronouns has changed, in the sense that the informal pronouns are now used more frequently than the formal ones; also, a certain, analytic clear form of prose is spreading rapidly at the moment, first of all through the newspapers; an old and very stiff and not easily mastered system of punctuation is now losing ground, though many teachers are still passionately fond of that system;—more and more words are pronounced as they are written,—so that even more foreign and rare words can be used by the layman.

The skeptical attitude to the elite-norms can be considered an advantage, as long as it does not provoke any sweeping politicization of language matters. And such a politicization seems improbable, given the relatively high degree of homogeneity within the speech community.

WHO DOES LANGUAGE TREATMENT IN DENMARK?

As an answer to the third question I should like to mention the following:

—The Danish Language Board
—Terminological boards

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—The Language Committee of Denmark's Radio (= the national broadcasting company)
—Grammar, dictionary and style-manual writers
—Linguists and others editing language columns in the media
—Language teachers, on many levels.

Among the 'language treatment' agents and agencies mentioned only one, namely the Danish Language Board is a *language planning* agency, in the strictest sense. Only this body is "governmental" and comes under a narrow LP-definition (used for example by Joan Rubin in *The Linguistic Reporter,* 1974:4 p. 7).

THE DANISH LANGUAGE BOARD (DLB)

The Danish Language Board, established in 1955, has about 22 members. These members represent the following institutions and organizations: The Ministry of Cultural Affairs; The Ministry of State; The Ministry of Justice; The Ministry of Education; three out of the five Danish universities; The Royal Academy of Education; The Danish Academy; The Danish Broadcasting Company; The Institution for Public Information; The Placename Committee; The Danish Society for Language and Literature; The Cooperative Committee of the Danish Teachers' Organizations; The Association of Danish Writers; The Cooperative Committee of the Danish Press; The Journalists' Organization; The Actors' Organization; The Nordic Society. All of the 22 members, however, ordinarily participate in one annual meeting only. Almost all the decisions are made in *the executive committee* in which nine out of the 22 members have a seat. The executive committee usually meets once every two weeks.

The daily work in the language board is done by a staff of five linguists and six (half-time) clerks. The government pays the salaries of the linguists and the clerks, and it pays other current expenses as well. It should be noted, however, that the nine members of the executive committee (with an exception made for the chairman) do not get any salary for the work they do.

The government regulation defines the different tasks of the board, and among these tasks at least the following four should be mentioned:

(a) on scientific grounds to give the public and the government bodies information and guidance in language matters;
(b) to follow the development of the Danish language;
(c) to edit and publish an orthography-dictionary and other handbooks and periodicals on language matters;
(d) to cooperate with similar boards in other countries in matters of mutual interest.

I shall now briefly go through each of these four tasks, and state how they are taken care of, in the practical work of the board.

Giving information and guidance: Anyone can get advice and help in matters of Danish usage from the DLB. This service is made frequent use of, and around 6,500 queries from government institutions and the public are answered every year. The majority of them are answered by telephone. The questions cover the whole linguistic field—semantics, syntax, morphology, usage, pronunciation, etc. The questions are put by school children, typists and clerks, as well as by government bodies, teachers and university professors.

In answering these questions on, as the rules go, "scientific grounds" the board usually consults existing sources for data about the matters in question. That is, one of the linguists employed goes through dictionaries and grammar books in the library,—and she looks for relevant information in the comprehensive files on present-day Danish usage. In case the same question has been answered earlier by the board, the old answer is traced through a special file of answers, and in this way the earlier answer is used again, in a maybe somewhat changed formulation. It should, however, be mentioned that the scientific basis of the board is not really "scientific" since the principles and procedures of work have never been explicitly formulated. There does not yet exist any formulated methodology or theory of language planning (or language treatment) for Danish.

The recipients of the Board's advice are free to follow the recommendations. There is only one exception to this; government institutions are obliged to follow the spelling of the "Orthography Dictionary." But otherwise everybody is free to speak and write in a non-recommended manner, and the Board has no sanctions it can institute against violators. It should be noted too, that the Board follows the course of only reacting on somebody's request. The Board puts an emphasis on not taking any initiatives. Some people are dissatisfied with this passivity as it keeps the Board from preventing problems, for instance preventing the appearance of loanwords in a linguistic form which does not fit existing Danish patterns. The Board, on the other hand, defends itself by arguing that it can only keep its present position as a respected and "neutral" institution, by not being provocative in any way.

The second of the tasks mentioned, to follow the development of the Danish language, is mainly taken care of by a continued revision and building up of the earlier mentioned files. Most of the cards in the file have a certain word-or phrase-entry and give one or more excerpted quotations which illustrate the usage of the secific entry-unit.

The third task mentioned is editing and publishing. In the editing of the "Orthography Dictionary," the extensive files serve as an important data base. The language Board also has other publications. Since 1960, the Board has published the half yearly periodical *Nyt fra Sprognaevnet,* (News from The Language Board). It also publishes a numbered series of publications, written by individual persons on different

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matters relevant to language cultivation. Until now seven volumes have been published in this series. Furthermore the Board has sent out various publications in another, unnumbered series. This unnumbered series includes books on, for instance, Nordic numerals, on transcription from the Cyrillic alphabet, on inter-nordic tourist-words, on the accretion of words in Danish in the period 1969 to 1973. Most of these books are published on a common basis by all of the Nordic language boards. This is also the case with the yearly periodical *Sprog i Norden* (Languages in the Nordic Countries).

Here we are already touching on the fourth of the tasks of the board, namely confering and cooperating with similar boards in other countries. In practice this means extensive cooperation with the other Nordic language boards. This Nordic cooperation mainly aims at safeguarding the existing inter-intelligibility between the three central-Scandinavian languages (Danish, Swedish, Norwegian).

The consultations with the other Nordic language boards are an almost daily routine. Cases of mutual interest — and they are many — are discussed, in letters or in more urgent cases on the telephone. Representatives from the Nordic language boards have ordinary meetings twice a year, and other meetings are held in relation to specific common projects.

There are certain indications that the Nordic language cooperation will be expanded and intensified in the coming years. First, it has now been decided to establish a common Nordic language secretariat with the task of coordinating and promoting the whole language cooperation. This secretariat will at first get a rather limited staff: one linguist and a clerk. And the secretariat will be effective from July 1, 1978. Secondly, there have been plans worked out for a common Nordic TV and radio-satellite. This satellite could be ready for operation in 1980. If the plans are carried out, the satellite may make it possible to receive all of the 7 TV and 11 radio programs in each of the five Nordic countries.

IMPROVEMENTS OF THE PRESENT TREATMENT PATTERN?

In answering the fifth and last question I will try to criticize the present Danish 'treatment pattern' (cf. NEUSTUPNÝ 1974: 37 ff.). This will be done mainly by focusing on the practice of the DLB, as this institution represents the by far most qualified language treatment in Denmark.

In my opinion the major insufficiencies of the DLB are the following:

(a) The conception of the 'language planning'-field is inconsistent and defective. It is characteristic that most of the cases are treated in an ad hoc manner, without being based on a general theoretical framework. This lack of a sufficient and satisfying theoretical understanding is very much due to the second insufficiency.

(b) The lack of methodical and theoretical research work within the field.

(c) A process-consciousness among Danish language planners is almost absent. The method of operation is, as far as I know, never thoroughly discussed. Evaluations of the completed planning activities, have, to my knowledge, never been made. Work on this point could probably result in considerable improvements.

(d) The Danish language treatment is not really future-oriented. The linguists have mainly been taught the history and the grammar of the language, and they are not too well equipped for planning and predicting future developments.

(e) The approach of the Danish language planners has been too linguistically dominated. The interactions between the language, the individual user, the groups of users, and the social conditions have not been satisfactorily surveyed by the DLB. There is a need for including a wider range of disciplines in decision making.

(f) The DLB has paid all too much attention to the small segments of language. The board has, like stylebook-writers and others, almost neglected the larger linguistic units: the sentences, the periods, the paragraphs, the text as a whole. For good reasons DLB has the nickname of "The Danish *Word* Board."

Most of the above mentioned six insufficiencies could be remedied by changes in the educational background of the linguists working in language planning and language treatment. In my opinion, the relevant education for future Danish language planners should consist of: First of all, a solid general linguistic training; the language planner should have a thorough knowledge of the Danish language. Secondly, the language planner should get training within the following fields: sociology & sociolinguistics; pragmatics; psycholinguistics; textlinguistics; general planning theory; and last but not least, training in the theory of language planning. However, the training must not be only theoretical. The whole course should consist of a continuous alternation between practical and theoretical work. With training of the kind that I have sketched here, I think that Danish language planners would be better off.

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